

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1     1.     A method comprising:  
2             enabling, via a web site hosted by a third-party payment service, a sender  
3     party to arrange for shipment of a package to a recipient party via a shipping vendor;  
4             interacting with an online facility hosted by the shipping vendor to facilitate the  
5     shipment; and  
6             facilitating, via the third-party payment service, payment from the sender party  
7     to the shipping vendor for the shipment.

1     2.     The method of claim 1, wherein the arranging for the shipment of the package  
2     includes:  
3             serving a first set of web pages including one or more web pages to a client  
4     operated by the sender party via which the sender party may enter shipping  
5     information;  
6             passing the shipping information entered by the sender party to an on-line  
7     interface provided by the shipping vendor;  
8             receiving shipment data generated by the shipping vendor in response to the  
9     passing of the shipping information; and  
10            providing the shipment data to the sender party via a second set of web  
11     pages including one or more web pages.

1     3.     The method of claim 2, wherein data is passed between the third-party  
2     payment service and the shipping vendor in the form of XML (extensible markup

3 language) documents, and the on-line interface comprises an XML application  
4 program interface (API).

1 4. The method of claim 2, wherein the shipping information includes send to:  
2 address information that may be entered by the sender party via a corresponding  
3 web page.

1 5. The method of claim 2, wherein the shipping information includes send from:  
2 address information that may be entered by the sender party via a corresponding  
3 web page.

1 6. The method of claim 2, wherein the shipping information includes send to:  
2 address information that pertains to an address registered with one of the shipping  
3 vendor or third-party payment service that is automatically retrieved from a  
4 database.

1 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the payment of the shipment is facilitated by:  
2 providing the payment from the third-party service to the shipping vendor; and  
3 deducting a shipping cost of the shipment from a third-party payment service  
4 account held by the sender party.

1 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the payment from the third-party service to  
2 the shipping vendor is facilitated via a debit/credit card authorization/settlement  
3 network.

1 9. The method of claim 8, wherein the payment from the third-party service to  
2 the shipping vendor employs a virtual debit card.

1    10.    The method of claim 1, further comprising providing a computer interface via  
2    the third-party service that functions as a proxy to enable a user to obtain a shipping  
3    account with the shipping vendor.

1    11.    The method of claim 1, further comprising serving data to a client computer  
2    operated by the sender party to enable the sender party to print out a shipping label  
3    pertaining to the shipment.

1    12.    The method of claim 1, wherein an arrangement of the shipment and payment  
2    to the shipping vendor appears to the shipping vendor as if the sender party is  
3    directly accessing on-line facilities hosted by the shipping vendor.

1    13.    The method of claim 1, further comprising enabling the sender party to view  
2    tracking information related to shipment of the package via the third-party payment  
3    service.

1    14.    The method of claim 11, wherein the third-party payment service enables the  
2    sender party to view tracking information by:  
3        automatically navigating, via a proxy operation, to a web site hosted by the  
4    shipping vendor and entering a tracking number; and  
5        directing a web server hosting the web site to send a tracking summary page  
6    generated in response to entry of the tracking number to a client computer operated  
7    by the sender party.

1    15.    The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2           tabulating shipment purchases for each user over a predetermined period;  
3   and  
4           preventing a user from arranging further shipments if the tabulated purchases  
5   over the predetermined period exceed a predetermined purchase limit.

1   16.   A system comprising:  
2           a web server; and  
3           an integrated shipping server, linked in communication with the web server,  
4           the web server and integrated shipping server comprising software  
5   instructions that when executed enable a sender to arrange for shipment of a  
6   package to a recipient via a shipping vendor by performing operations, including:  
7           generating and serving web pages via which shipping information  
8           pertaining to the shipment may be automatically entered and/or manually  
9           entered by the sender; and  
10          interacting with an on-line interface hosted by the shipping vendor to  
11          arrange for shipment of the package via the shipping vendor through use of  
12          the shipping information;  
13          receiving shipping data pertaining to the shipment from the shipping  
14          vendor, said shipping data including data corresponding to a shipping label;  
15          and  
16          generating and serving a web page via which the shipping label may  
17          be printed.

1   17.   The system of claim 16, further comprising a payment server linked in  
2   communication with the integrated shipping server and comprising further software  
3   instructions that when executed perform the operation of facilitating payment for the  
4   shipment from the seller to the shipping vendor.

1 18. The system of claim 17, wherein the system is configured to be operable by a  
2 third-party payment service for which the seller has an account, and facilitating  
3 payment of the shipment comprises:

4 providing payment from the third-party service to the shipping vendor; and  
5 deducting a shipping cost of the shipment from the seller's third-party  
6 payment service account.

1 19. The system of claim 18, wherein payment from the third-party service to the  
2 shipping vendor is facilitated via interaction between the payment server and a  
3 debit/credit card authorization/settlement network.

1 20. The system of claim 19, wherein execution of the software instructions further  
2 performs the operations of:

3 generating a virtual debit card; and  
4 employing the virtual debit card to pay the shipping vendor.

1 21. The system of claim 16, wherein execution of the software instructions further  
2 perform the operation of performing a proxy operation to enable the seller to obtain a  
3 shipping account with the shipping vendor via interaction with web pages served by  
4 the web server.

1 22. The system of claim 16, wherein execution of the software instructions further  
2 perform the operations of:

3 storing a tracking number corresponding to the shipment that is received from  
4 the shipping vendor;

5            automatically navigating, via a proxy operation, to a web site hosted by the  
6 shipping vendor and entering the tracking number; and  
7            directing a web server hosting the web site to send a tracking summary page  
8 generated in response to entry of the tracking number to a client computer operated  
9 by the seller.